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SOME NASKAPI MYTHS FROM LITTLE WHALE RIVER.¹

BY FRANK G. SPECK.

IN the summer of 1913, while investigating some lines of culture contact between the northern Ojibwa, Cree and Montagnais, I encountered John Turner, a native of Moose Factory, who narrated the following myths of the Naskapi of Little Whale River, on the east coast of Hudson's Bay, near Richmond Gulf, longitude 78° west, latitude 56° north.

I also include a short cannibal-monster story from the Waswanipi Band of Cree (*Waswániipi illuwak*, "Far-away Water People"), who hunt around Waswanipi Lake (longitude 76.3° west, latitude 49.3° north). This was narrated by a Waswanipi woman met with on Rivière des Quinze, Quebec. Linguistic material from the Waswanipi Band shows the dialect to be Cree (belonging to the so-called *l* and *k* type). Its closest affinities, in phonetics and etymology, are with the Moose Factory dialect. The Waswanipi are about at the southeastern boundary of the Cree-speaking group. South of them are the Tête de Boules and Algonkin; east of them, the Montagnais; and northeast, the Mistassini.

I. AYAS'I.

Ayas'i² was a great chief and trickster. He was an old man and had two wives, — an older one, his first wife; and a younger one, his second. By the older one he had a grown-up son, and several younger ones by the other wife. Now, the young woman was very jealous of the older wife, because she thought that Ayas'i would give the chieftainship to his son by his first wife; in other words, to his oldest son. She tried in different ways to invent stories against the son to poison Ayas'i's mind against him. She kept telling Ayas'i that the oldest son was trying to seduce her. Although Ayas'i liked his oldest son, he came at last to believe the younger woman's stories, and began to suspect the boy. But the stories he heard were not proved. The boy was very quiet and well-behaved.

One day the young woman was out in the bush and saw a partridge, and then she thought of a plan to trap the boy. She hurried back to the camp, and told the son to come and shoot the bird for her. "Oh, no!" said he, "there are plenty of younger boys here. Get

¹ Published with the permission of the Geological Survey of Canada.

² The vowel *a* is pronounced like *u* of English *but*; ' denotes that the preceding consonant is long; ' denotes main stress; ' denotes aspiration.

some of them to go and kill the partridge." But she coaxed him to come, saying that he was so much more able. At last he consented, and went with her and killed the partridge. Then the young wife pulled up her dresses, took the dying bird, and made it scratch her between the legs until she was lacerated around her lower parts. Then she went back to the camp. That night Ayas'i lay beside her and desired to cohabit. "No, no!" she said, "I'm too sore. I'm all cut up from my struggles with your oldest son." Ayas'i was surprised. Then she showed him the scratches and wounds, and told him how he had struggled with her in the woods and raped her. So Ayas'i grew bitter against the boy.

The next day a big canoe crowd arrived at the camp, as Ayas'i was a great man and often had visitors from far away. He got the crowd together, and said to them, "Now, to-morrow we will all go to the islands and collect eggs for a great feast for my son, as he wants eggs from the islands." Ayas'i was a great chief, so whatever he said had to be done. The next morning he told his son, "You must come too." — "No," said the son, "I don't want any eggs, anyway." But Ayas'i made him go too. So he got his canoe; and they embarked, and paddled toward a big island, Ayas'i at the stern, and the son paddling at the bow. When they saw a big island, the son asked, "Is that the island?" — "Yes," said Ayas'i. Then he blew his breath and blew the island farther ahead. The son could not see his father blowing, and wondered why the island could not be approached.

At last, however, they reached the island when Ayas'i thought they were far enough from home. "Now, go ashore and gather eggs," said Ayas'i. His son began gathering eggs near the shore. "Now go farther up. There are some fine eggs over yon rise. Don't stop so near the shore," said Ayas'i. Every time the son would look behind to see how far he was from the shore, Ayas'i would send him farther inland. Then, when the boy was some distance in, Ayas'i jumped into the canoe and paddled away home. The son called after him, "Father, father, you are leaving me!" — "Well, you have been making a wife of your step-mother," cried Ayas'i; and away he went, leaving his son behind. So the boy was left on the island, and wandered about, crying.

One day the boy met a Gull. "O grandchild! what are you doing here alone?" asked the Gull. "My father left me," said the boy. "You won't ever see the mainland again," said the Gull; "but I'll try to take you myself. Get on my back, and I will try." So the boy got on his back, and the Gull tried to fly up. But the boy was too heavy, and the Gull had to turn back. "But go over to the other end of the island, and there you will find your grandfather.¹ Maybe he can help you," said the Gull.

¹ Merely a term used in addressing older people.

So the boy wandered on, crying, and soon came to the other end of the island. There he saw a big Catfish (?). "What are you doing here?" said the Catfish. "My father left me," said the boy. "What do you want?" said the Catfish. "To get ashore to the mainland," said the boy. "Well," said the Catfish, "maybe I can take you over. Is it clear?" (The great Catfish was afraid of the thunder.) — "Yes," said the boy. "Are there no clouds?" asked the Fish. "No," said the boy. "Are you sure? Well, then take a stone in your hand and get on my back. Hold on tight to my horns (the Catfish had two horns on his head); and when you find me going too slowly, hammer with the stone, and I'll hurry faster, especially if it begins to look cloudy. Are you sure there are no clouds? Well, hold on tight, now!" And with this they started like the wind. Every little while the boy would hit the Fish a rap with the stone, and he would go still faster. Soon it began clouding up. "Is it clouding up yet?" asked the Fish. "No," answered the boy, even though he heard thunder. "What's that I hear? Is it thunder?" asked the Fish. "Oh, no!" cried the boy, and hit him harder with the stone.

Just then they reached the mainland; and the boy just had time to jump ashore, when a thunder-bolt came and smashed the Fish to pieces. But the boy got safely ashore, and began wandering about until at last he came to a small wigwam. He walked up and lifted the door-cover. There inside he saw a Fox sitting before a small kettle over the fire. When the Fox saw him, she said, "Well, grandchild, what are you doing here?" — "My father left me," the boy told her. Said the Fox, "I don't think you will ever succeed in getting home, as your father is very tricky and strong. Nevertheless I will try to help you."

In the mean time the boy's mother, the first wife of Ayas'i, felt very bad over the loss of her son. She cried all the time. She would go away in the woods by herself all day and cry; and every night, when she came home, Ayas'i would meet her outside the door and throw embers from the fire on her and burn her. So this went on day after day.

Now, the Fox agreed to help the boy. She transformed herself into a person and guided him along the trail. Soon they came to a place where a lot of hooks (like fish-hooks) were hanging down from the sky. There was no way of getting past without being impaled. Then the Fox turned herself into a small animal, and went up into the sky where the hooks were hung, and jerked them up. She told the boy to jump by when she jerked them up; and he did so, and got safely by.

As they went along farther, they soon came to a place where two monster-dogs were guarding the path. It was very narrow, and there

were a lot of rocks. The Fox turned herself into a weasel, and turned the boy into another small animal. Then she wriggled in and out among the rocks, and the dogs began barking fiercely. "I'm barking at Ayas'i's son!" cried the dogs. The Fox in her weasel form popped up here and there among the rocks until the dogs were frantic. They barked so much, that their master got angry at them, and came out and killed them for making such a noise about nothing; for every time he looked to see what caused them to bark, he could not see anything. When the dogs were dead, the Fox led the boy through safely. Now, these obstacles were all put along the trail by Ayas'i to prevent his son from getting back.

As the boy and his guide, the Fox, passed on, they soon came to a place where there was a flint stone, rounded on the end, and three-cornered on its sides. Then the Fox-Woman said, "Carry that stone with you, you may need it." So the boy took the stone. Soon they came to a wigwam where lived two women who guarded the way. These women had sharp teeth set in their vulva, with which they killed anybody who cohabited with them. This every one had to do before he could pass them. The Fox-Woman told the boy that he would have to cohabit with these women, but to use the stone. So that night, when they intended to kill him, he used the long stone on them, and broke all the teeth in their vulvas. Then he cohabited with them, and afterward passed safely on. So they started on again.

In the mean time the boy's mother continued her mourning. When she went into the woods, she would hear the little birds singing about her where she lay down. Their song would say, "Mother, I'm coming back." When she first heard it, she thought it was her son returning, and she would look up to meet him; but when she saw it was only little birds, she would cry all the harder. Then, when she would go back to camp at night, Ayas'i would burn her again. At last she became so down-hearted that she would pay no attention to the birds, who said, "Mother, I'm coming back."

At last one day the boy, after passing all the trials, did come back; and the Fox-Woman guided him to where his mother lay crying. When he saw her, he cried, "Mother, I'm coming!" but she would not look up, thinking it was only the birds mocking her grief. Then the boy went up to her, and she saw him. He beheld her face, all burnt and scorched. "What has caused your face to be burnt?" he asked. "Your father did it. He says my son will never come back," she replied. "Well," said the son, "Go to camp, and tell Ayas'i that I am back."

So they went along back to the camp. When Ayas'i heard the woman coming again, he jumped up to get coals of fire to throw on her, as usual. "Your son will never come back!" he cried. "Yes,

he is back now!" Ayas'i was so surprised that he dropped the fire; and when he looked, there stood his son. So the son said to his father, "You have been cruel to me and to my mother, all for nothing. You left me on an island, and I am back. Now I will be cruel to you. You shall creep all the days of your life." So he turned Ayas'i into a frog. He then said to his mother, "You shall be the best-looking bird in the world. People will never kill you. You shall be the robin." And he turned his mother into a robin, the handsomest bird in the world. That is the origin of the frog and the robin. That is the end.

2. THE FOUR WIND BROTHERS.

There were four brothers in a family which lived in a great cave in the earth. Of these four brothers, one was the North, another was the South, another the West, and the other the East. These were the Wind brothers, who made the winds. The West was the youngest of them; the North was the oldest; the South was the next to the oldest; and the East was the next to the West, the youngest. To cause the winds they would stand up, so as to be head above the great hole, and blow. Then the wind would come according to which of the brothers made it, the north, south, east, or west. And so it continued. The West was very wild when he raised a wind. But the oldest, the North, said to him, "No, no! Don't do that! You will raise such high winds that it will destroy the people, the Indians." Then when the youngest, the West, jumped up again to blow a wind, the North would tell him, "No, no! Stop, you will kill our mother!" Well, so they lived, these brothers, causing and regulating the winds of the world.

It happened that the North wind was the softest, and the East wind a little stronger, harder. The South also came with gusts, strong, but not as bad as the West wind, the youngest brother, who was the worst. When these brothers made the winds, they were satisfied with doing just enough not to destroy the people, but tried to manage things rightly. They would say, all of them, "We must try to look after our people, not to destroy them with our winds!"

3. THE GIANT CARRIED OFF BY THE EAGLE.

There was once a giant Beaver who had his house on the top of a great big rock on the shore of a lake. This Beaver was about one hundred feet long, and his cabin was very large. Near him lived a giant man who used to hunt the Beaver, but lived in fear of a monster Eagle who was watching all the time to carry him off. This Eagle was so large that he could pick up the giant as easily as an ordinary eagle could carry off a rat, even though the giant was taller than the largest tree, and broad to suit his height.

At last the giant's family grew so hungry, that he was compelled to go and hunt: so he took his ice-chisel¹ and went to chisel for the giant Beaver. He drove the Beaver from his nest, and at last cornered him and killed him. Then he packed him on his back and started for home. On the way the Eagle saw him coming, swooped down, and picked up both the hunter and his beaver as easily as he would two rabbits. Far up on a rocky mountain he flew with them to where he had his nest, thousands of feet above the valley. His nest was very large and had young eagles in it. When he got there, he began picking the beaver to pieces to feed it to his young eagles. Now, he kept the giant safe in the nest until the beaver was all gone.

In a few days there was nothing left of the beaver, and the Eagle got ready to kill the giant hunter. He rose high in the air, and swooped down to strike the giant with his wings and claws. Then the giant took his chisel and held it blade up, with the hind end braced against the ledge, so that when the Eagle swooped he would strike upon it. There it held fast; so that every time the Eagle swooped to strike the giant, he struck upon the chisel and cut his breast. After several trials the Eagle fell over dead into the nest.

Now, the giant was free from his captor, but could not get down from the nest on the cliff. He killed the young eagles. At last an idea came to him as to how to save himself. He cut the Eagle open down the breast and crawled inside. The idea came to him to shove off the cliff, and that the Eagle's wings and body would break his fall. So he pushed off, and down they went a mile through the air. He landed heavily, but was not hurt. He looked around to see where he was, and soon started for home. He had a long way to go, the Eagle had carried him so far.

In the mean time, when the giant's family found that he did not return the day he went for beaver, they started out to track him. They trailed him to where he had killed the Beaver, and farther, soon coming to a place where his tracks ended suddenly, as though he had been picked up. Here they gave up and went back to their camp. Said one of the old men, "Our son must have been carried away by some creature. We must help him all we can by our thoughts." So they waited and "wished" for his safe return. At last, after a few days, the giant arrived, and told his adventures; but the old man said, "It was not your cunning or strength that saved you, but the strength of our thoughts."

4. THE SNOW MAN.

An Indian was travelling in the winter-time; and the snow was soft and slushy, as the weather had grown warm. He was wading

¹ The ice-chisel is made by attaching a bone, or nowadays a metal blade, to a pole of sufficient length.

through the slush on his journey. The walking was so bad that he grew angrier as he proceeded. At last he came to a lake, and found that it was covered with water on the ice, and he had to wade through it. As he got wetter, he grew still angrier; and he exclaimed at last, "Why does the North Man do this? Why doesn't he send good winter weather?"

At last he came to a portage at the other end of the lake. As he started on the portage, he saw a man all in white standing before him. At first he did not know who it could be; but as he came closer, he discovered that it was a Snow Man. He had been feeling very angry as he came along, and the Snow Man saw how cross he looked. When the hunter came close, the Snow Man said, "What is the matter?" Then the hunter replied, "Such terrible slush and melting weather! The North Man is no good." Then the Snow Man said, "I can't do anything for you now; but some time I will try to help you." — "All right," said the hunter. The Snow Man disappeared, and the hunter went on with his journey.

The spring came, and warm weather. The lake melted and broke up. Then the hunter thought to himself, "I wonder what the Snow Man meant when he said he would help me!" He began to hunt, and saved the grease from the animals he killed, and put it all in bladders. He made a big camp and cut lots of wood, and kept piling up wood and storing grease all summer and fall, for he thought the Snow Man had meant something serious by what he had said.

When fall was over, the weather began to grow cold, and the snow season commenced. It snowed and snowed, and drifted in great masses around his camp and over the wigwam. So the winter went on colder and colder, until one day the Snow Man came to the camp. He found the hunter sitting by his fire. "How do you find the weather now?" said the Snow Man. "All right," replied the hunter. The Snow Man staid, and the cold increased and the snow drifted higher. The hunter kept putting wood on the fire, and pouring grease on it, to make it burn stronger. By and by the Snow Man again asked the hunter, "How do you like the weather now?" — "All right," answered the hunter, as before. He had really had enough cold weather, but he would not give in. He stood the cold well, because he had plenty of provisions, wood, and grease. He used these and piled wood on his fire, making the wigwam hotter and hotter.

At last the Snow Man could stand it no longer, for he was commencing to melt. Soon he had to go away. But before he went, he told the hunter, "You are a stronger man than I am. You have conquered me, and now I will leave." After that he departed, and the cold began to moderate. The winter continued not so cold, but just as it should be, — not too cold nor too warm. It was a good winter, and since then the winters have not been so extreme.

5. STORY OF A CANNIBAL.

(From *Lake Waswanipi Band of Cree.*)

There was once a man who had two sons, little boys, whom he left in camp when he went off to hunt beaver. He had not been gone long before Djec'actodji'ne'hwan¹ came to the camp and saw the little boys. "Where has your father gone?" he asked them. One of them told him that their father had gone to hunt beaver. Then Djec'actodji'ne'hwan told them not to tell anybody that he had been there. Said he, "I am going to hunt up your father and kill him to-night. I will build a big fire to cook his beavers. But you must not tell anybody." And he went away.

When night came, the little boys' mother came and asked them if anybody had been there. "Yes, Djec'actodji'ne'hwan," they replied. Then she asked them what he had said. And they told her he had said he would kill their father and make a big fire to cook his beavers, and that he had told them not to tell anybody.

So the woman got her relatives together, and they set out to hunt for the father. Soon they came to where they could see a big fire; and they saw a big body laid out straight beside the fire, and Djec'actodji'ne'hwan cutting big slices off its side and roasting them in the fire. When they drew nearer, they saw that it was the hunter who was being eaten. Then the mother began crying; but one of the men told her not to cry. He said, "We will kill the cannibal (*witigo*) who has killed your husband." And they got snares and set them about. Then Djec'actodji'ne'hwan got caught in the snares, and the men beat him to death with axes. Then they threw him into the fire and burned him all up; and they buried the hunter's body. One arm was already eaten off.

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¹ Translated by the narrator, who spoke very little English, as "cap."